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SUBJECT: Badghis' New Governor Takes Tough Stance

Ref: Kabul 841

1. (U) Summary. Governor Dilbar Jan Arman, former Zabul governor, took up his new position as governor of Badghis on March 28. During his first week in office, Arman met with line ministers, government employees, tribal elders and other important actors in the province, including the Regional Command and the Spanish-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). Arman has been forceful in his initial round of meetings, placing an emphasis on anti-corruption, anti-insurgency, and anti-narcotics activities. First impressions of Governor Arman have been positive despite efforts by those loyal to former Governor Mohammad Ashraf Naseri to discredit him. Military and civilian elements of the PRT are concerned that Governor Arman, who is accustomed to the greater resources of a U.S.-led PRT and maneuver unit, has unrealistic expectations of the capacities the PRT has available to assist him. An early test of the governor's skills will be his management of the organizational and security challenges surrounding the August elections. End Summary.

2. (U) Governor Arman, a Pashtun from Khost, was appointed governor of Badghis Province in early March in a governor "swap" with former Badghis Governor Mohammad Ashraf Naseri. During his first week on the job, Arman established his agenda with tough talk and clear priorities. He met with his deputy, line ministers, government employees, tribal elders, the Spanish-led PRT, and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

3. (U) Arman has set a no-nonsense tone with local officials in the course of his meetings. For example, the governor ended a Provincial Development Council (PDC) meeting after only ten minutes, when it became obvious line ministers were ill-prepared despite prior written instructions. The governor said he would never again tolerate this lack of preparation. Line ministers were stunned as they left the shortest PDC meeting in recent memory. In a separate meeting with tribal elders from Taliban-plagued Bala Murghab district, he told officials and elders that he held them accountable for their communities, and even went so far as to say that he would not accept the usual excuse that the Taliban are outsiders over whom they have no control. Arman warned others that insurgents face waning days in Badghis Province. The governor emphasized getting rid of the Taliban and countering its propaganda is not enough, and that the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) must voice its vision for the future of the province in order to replace Taliban control.

4. (SBU) In addition to his strong message to GIROA officials, Arman consistently preached a mantra of inclusion of all residents of the province in the future of Badghis, not just Pashtuns (as the former governor had done). His message is sure to threaten some local officials and power brokers who benefitted from the corrupt administration of Governor Naseri and are now without a benefactor, including the deputy governor who is from a different political party. They may attempt to discredit the governor by circulating rumors of Arman's alleged corruption in Zabul and the local protests that spurred his removal. For now, the public seems to be taking a

"wait and see" approach to the governor.

¶5. (U) The governor pressed GIROA and Coalition Forces (CF) to proactively pursue drug traffickers and Taliban rather than merely react to their operations. During a meeting with tribal elders and the PRT, he pressed the ANSF and CF to provide more security for the construction of the Sang-Atesh to Akazai road and the Qadis to Jawand road, telling them that if workers are attacked, they need to strike back forcefully. These comments reportedly left PRT Commander Sarabia speechless. Arman also made it clear that he intends to offer more direction to the PRT and AECID (Spanish development agency) on how to spend money in the province.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Arman is off to a positive start, and his stated priority of fighting endemic corruption in the provincial government could be a welcome contrast to the former governor. He will need to look close to home if he seeks to root out corruption - the deputy governor, several line ministers, the head of the provincial council, and even the capital's mayor all have alleged links to corruption in some form. His push for ANSF and CF to clean out Taliban strongholds in Bala Murghab, Qadis and Moqur districts will be resisted by some Pashtun leaders at the national and provincial levels, possibly earning him more enemies in the province. The governor must watch his traditional allies just as close. He will have to watch officials from his own Hezb-e Islami party (including his office director, the Chief Judge, and Mohammad Omer Nezami, a powerful community leader) who may attempt to abuse political connections with the governor for their own benefit, which would taint his tenure. Thus far, his only trusted ally is his 25-year

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old secretary, a man without experience in the province.

¶7. (SBU) Finally, the governor may not fully appreciate the lesser capacities of the Spanish-led PRT, compared to the U.S. PRT to which he was accustomed in Qalat. The Spanish have attempted to reduce Arman's expectations, telling him their PRT has limited capacity to provide security and development aid compared to the United States. The August elections will be an early test of Arman's ability to manage these competing powers. He will face security and organizational challenges to make sure they play out without major incidents.

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